

Fuerteventura – Winter Sun Birding

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Fuerteventura
Days 2-7	Day excursions on the island
Day 8	Fly UK

Departs

November and February

Focus

Birds, plus endemic flora and fauna

Grading

Grade A. Short walks, but sometimes on uneven ground.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP60)

Highlights

- A winter break in the sunshine
- Relaxed birding on Fuerteventura
- Superb chance to see the endangered Houbara Bustard
- Further specialities include Cream-coloured Courser and the unique Canary Islands Stonechat
- African Blue Tit, Berthelot's Pipit, Plain Swift
- Chances to stumble upon Afro-European migrants and perhaps an odd vagrant
- Led by expert naturalist guides



From Top: Canary Islands Stonechat, Houbara Bustard, Cream-coloured Courser



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Introduction

Fuerteventura is a perfect location for a week of relaxed winter birding. Sitting 100 kilometres off the coast of Morocco – and one of the two most easterly islands of the fascinating Canary Islands archipelago – it enjoys an interesting and varied avifauna. Our seven-night stay on the island is based at a very comfortable, rural hotel in the north of the island, within 20km of several of the key locations, resulting in a generally relaxed pace to the tour and more time in the field to really watch the birds and other wildlife.

Amongst rocky slopes of ancient volcanoes and deeply incised stream beds – *barrancos* – the arid, semi-desert landscape of Fuerteventura is home to the Canary Islands Stonechat, its very own endemic bird. Sometimes elusive, with a bit of local knowledge it can be seen well as it flycatches along the deep ravines and rocky slopes. Fuerteventura is also a stronghold of the endangered Houbara Bustard – here with its own unique subspecies *fuertaventurae* (slightly richer in colour and more heavily barred than those in North Africa). Indeed, the island is nowadays probably the best place in the world to see this fast disappearing species. As we search for these two scarce and very special birds, we'll come across a range of other subdesert-dwelling specialists, such as Barbary Partridge, Egyptian Vultures (the endemic Canarian form *majorensis* is known locally as *Guirres*), Cream-coloured Courser, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, 'Desert Grey Shrike', Mediterranean Short-toed Lark, Spectacled Warbler and Trumpeter Finch.

In contrast to the starkness of the surrounding countryside, the little towns and villages away from the coast provide shady refuges where we can seek out African Blue Tit and a recent colonist, Laughing Dove. The flower-filled gardens are a great place to observe butterflies, too, with a well-established population of Monarchs present, as well as Geranium Bronze, African Grass Blue and Lang's Short-tailed Blue. The bays and inlets along the rocky north and west coasts of the island provide sheltered havens for wintering or migratory shorebirds, including Whimbrel and Kentish Plovers, while scanning the waves may at times provide a glimpse of a passing Cory's Shearwater or two. The volcanic cliffs provide a home for several pairs of Barbary Falcons (nowadays treated as a race of Peregrine Falcon) which roam widely and we might be lucky to find them. Fuerteventura also has a good track record for picking up migrants travelling between Europe and Africa, while even a trans-Atlantic vagrant or two from North America has turned up, too!



NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Fly Fuerteventura

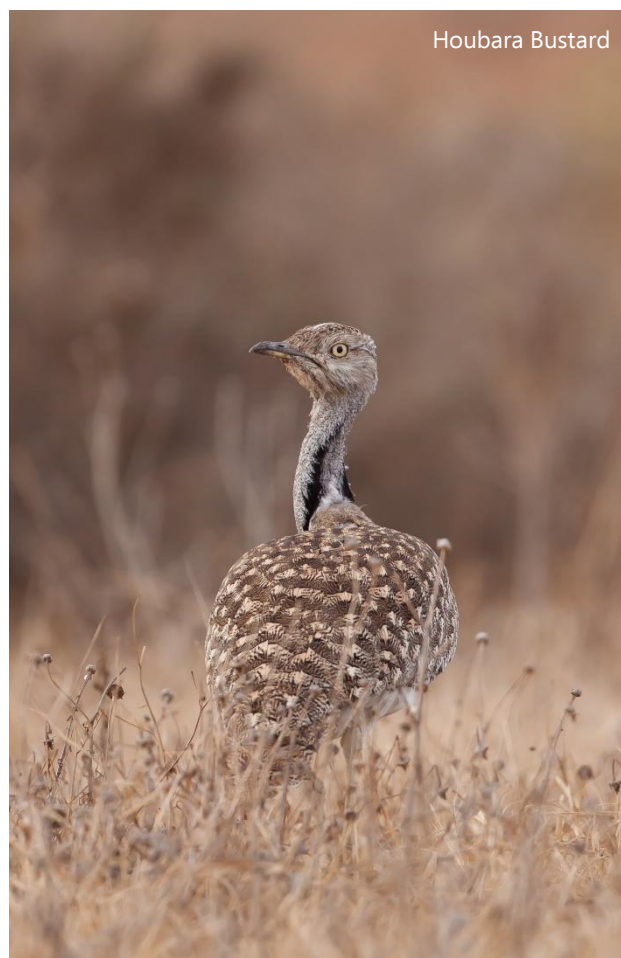
Fly to Fuerteventura from the UK with a scheduled easyJet flight from London Gatwick direct – although we hope to also be able to offer regional departures. A short drive takes us to our rural hotel in the heart of the island, where we spend all seven nights of our tour.

Days 2-7

Fuerteventura

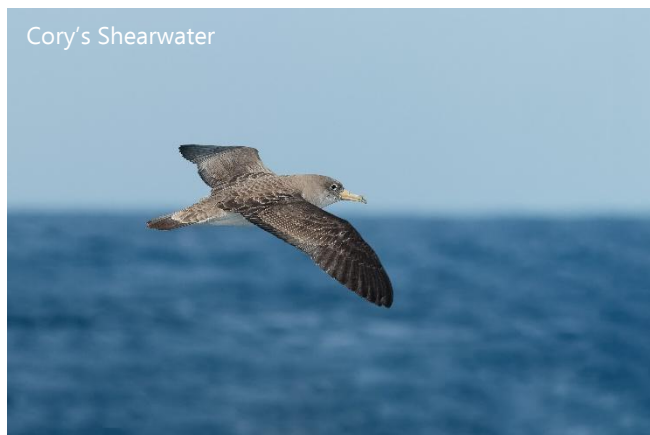
We have five days to fully explore the varied habitats of the island at a relaxed pace. A typical day would be an optional pre-breakfast walk near the hotel or short drive to a nearby *barranco*, followed by a day's excursion to a variety of habitats, where we make short walks. Lunch will be taken mostly as picnics or occasionally at local tavernas, followed by an afternoon itinerary and late afternoon return to the hotel. On some days, we may return earlier after lunch, allowing for some R&R around the hotel property for those that wish.

At approximately 100km long by 30km wide, Fuerteventura is the second largest and one of the easternmost of the Canary Islands. Its geography and climate are closely linked to North Africa, just 100km off its east coast and, similarly, its birding highlights reflect this close proximity. The area around the small town of Tindaya offers a great chance for seeking out species typical of desert or semi-desert landscapes with Cream-coloured Courser and Black-bellied Sandgrouse both present, while parties of Mediterranean Short-toed Larks skip across the stony steppe. Northern Ravens are very distinctive here, being smaller and with a higher-pitched, dog-like yap, whilst Egyptian Vultures soar over the island, their numbers bolstered recently by on-going conservation efforts. However, the star of this landscape is the furtive Houbara Bustard which, despite its size, somehow manages to hide incredibly well. Whilst the population of Houbara Bustard continues to decline due to increasing disturbance and human encroachment, here we have the best chance to see this gravely endangered bird. The busy Berthelot's Pipit is widespread and we should come across the 'beefy' Trumpeter Finch, Laughing Dove, 'Desert Grey Shrike' (the local race of Great Grey Shrike) and Spectacled Warbler.



Houbara Bustard

Incised into the relatively barren plains are deep, steep-sided gorges – *barrancos* – which have stretches of vegetated streambed where we can look for Plain Swift and Canary Islands Stonechat, the latter a species found nowhere else in the world. Often in pairs, this neat Fuerteventuran endemic is a real treat to find and watch. Isolated patches of water along the valley bottoms provide habitat for wintering Green and Common Sandpipers and Little Ringed Plover, plus Grey Heron and sometimes Spoonbill, whilst African Blue Tit and warblers occupy the bushes. Wary Barbary Partridge and wintering Song Thrushes and Ring Ouzels can be found lurking here, too.



An afternoon visit to the Faro del Tostón, north of El Cotillo, will enable us to scan offshore for Cory's Shearwater and watch the coastal skies for Barbary Falcon. Here, a range of shorebirds include Kentish and Common Ringed Plovers, Ruddy Turnstone, Greenshank, Whimbrel, Sanderling and Common Sandpiper, while wintering Eurasian Spoonbills feed in sandy coves.

The delightful little town of Betancuria nestles in the hills to the southwest of our hotel and, as the old capital of the island, is a cultural and agricultural centre. This picturesque old town offers a glimpse into Fuerteventura's past and acts as the centre for a day exploring the hill country of the interior. In places, introduced Barbary Ground Squirrels scurry amongst the rocks about the feet of visitors, while both Atlantic Canary and Sardinian Warbler can be found here, if we are lucky. On warm sunny days, White-banded Digger Bee and Canary Islands Blue-banded Bee can be seen about the flowers in the town itself.

Towards the west coast lies the reservoir of Los Molinos, which, perhaps unsurprisingly in an arid landscape such as this, acts as a magnet to wetland and migratory birds. Ruddy Shelduck and Black-winged Stilt occur here in good numbers alongside a big flock of Eurasian Coot. On the shores and streambed below the dam Little Ringed Plover, Green Sandpiper, Snipe, Dunlin and Little Stint could all be about – as can more Canary Island Stonechats. Above the slopes, the distinctive island race of Common Buzzard – actually genetically more closely-related to Long-legged Buzzard – can be seen at eye level, while the local form of Common Kestrel is typically easy to see here.

On one day we will go further afield, driving to Costa Calma in the southern end of the island to walk in the largest patch of woodland on the island, which often attracts wintering migrants like Brambling, Blackcap, Common Chiffchaff and even Woodcock, plus occasionally more unusual species like Yellow-browed Warbler. Hoopoes are frequent here as can be Cattle Egret and Atlantic Canary, while a small population of Red-vented Bulbuls now established from earlier cagebird escapes.



Day 8

Fuerteventura then Fly UK

If airline schedules allow, we should have time to enjoy some final birding on the island – perhaps a last look at the Houbaras - before we head to the east coast, the airport and our flight back to London.

Tour Grading

Easy. Mostly short, leisurely walks of up to 2km. Good walking shoes or lightweight boots are strongly recommended and it should be borne in mind that, though the pace is gentle, the terrain is often rocky and uneven and a moderate to good ability to walk on uneven ground is necessary. Walking sticks are useful as are walking seats at times, if you like to use them. Ground transport will be by minibus. **Note:** in looking for shy and elusive desert species, we may spend periods of time scanning or searching from the vehicle until the guide can assess the best viewing location once the birds have been located.

Food & Accommodation

Seven nights half board at a family-run, charming, rural hotel on Fuerteventura with a pool and gardens to relax in. All rooms are en suite. Lunches will be mostly picnics, taken in the field. Local food is Spanish-influenced, wholesome and varied.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, you can call us on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, make a reservation online at www.naturetrek.co.uk or, complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements as required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements at the time of booking.

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